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Peru Maoist Rebels Regroup as Vote Nears

Stepped-up Attacks by Sendero Luminoso Expected in Next 2 Months

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AYACUCHO, Peru—Stung but not defeated by a savage military counterattack, Maoist guerrillas here in the Peruvian Andes appear to be regrouping for an assault against the coming presidential elections.

Citing interrogation and field intelligence reports, well-informed Peruvian sources here and in the capital of Lima say the rebels of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) plan stepped-up attacks beginning early next month and extending through the April 14 elections and a likely runoff five or six weeks later.

Led by a one-time university professor named Abimael Guzman, Sendero Luminoso has wreaked havoc in the high Andes around this colonial city of 60,000 people since 1980.

Rights Abuses Alleged

The counterattack by the Peruvian armed forces has been accompanied by widespread accusations of human rights abuses by the military. Of more than 1,000 people listed as missing in the Ayacucho region, many were last seen in military custody. The insurgency is claiming about 10 lives per day, and two-thirds of the casualties are civilians, who are preyed upon by terrorists and soldiers alike.

In recent months, military pressure has apparently forced the guerrillas out of some areas of a 13-province emergency zone controlled by the armed forces under martial law. The numbers of terrorist incidents and disappearances have fallen in recent months, but both continue, the sources said.

The military campaign, however, has failed to make any apparent dent in the intellectual leadership of the guerrilla movement and seems not to have interrupted its coordination or communications.

A special security services intelligence unit called Scorpio has not been successful in its single-minded pursuit of Guzman—also known by the nom de guerre Camarada Gonzalo—and other Sendero leaders.

Many of the leaders, like Guzman himself, are former professors at the University of Huamanga here. They are described as having graduated from orthodox Marxism into a radical "curse-all-others" Maoism in the late 1960s and early '70s.

Sendero Luminoso guerrillas blacked out Lima briefly earlier this month in a carefully timed attack on power pylons on the last night of Pope John Paul II's visit to

*The terrorists . . .
have killed 1% of our
people,' officials said.*

Peru. They also ignited the symbol of a hammer and sickle on a hillside above the city. Two slum children later told police that they were paid about \$3 each by a youth who looked like a university student to set the hillside fire, according to press reports.

The attack during the Pope's visit was part of what guerrilla leaders are understood to be calling the "second consolidation of complementary actions of the second wave of the first campaign."

A "third 'consolidation' is due to start during the last week of this month, the intelligence reports indicate, and will be followed by a brief period of evaluation and a second campaign in March targeted on the election.

The guerrilla movement never makes public statements of any sort, but Peruvian analysts piece together sparse intelligence reports to provide such predictions.

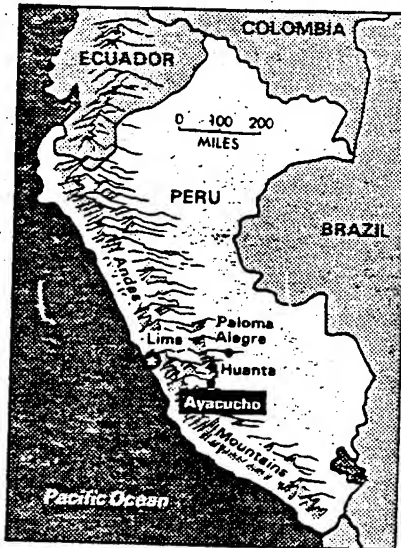
Rebel Efforts Impaired

In the Andes, where two policemen died in a Sendero Luminoso attack on an isolated small settlement the same night as the papal blackout, the Peruvian armed forces have reduced the geographical area in which the guerrillas can operate with impunity.

The guerrilla movement, whose poorly armed foot soldiers are mainly Quechua-speaking Indians from the poorest sectors of the highest mountains in the Ayacucho region, appears to have consolidated its forces in the high jungle on the eastern slopes of the Andes north of the town of Huanta.

By most estimates, the insurgency has claimed about 5,000 lives since it began in 1980. However, there are strong indications that the carnage has actually been much greater. In their own casualty count—not yet published here—Peruvian security services say that 3,246 people died between January and December of last year alone.

The report breaks down the casualties this way: 98 members of the armed forces and security services, 1,001 guerrillas and 2,147 civilians, including about 60 local



Los Angeles Times

officials killed by the rebels. The report lists 1,200 terrorist incidents of all kinds in the first 11 months of last year, including 372 in the Ayacucho region and 258 in Lima.

In addition, there are a number of reports—called credible by the security forces but without independent corroboration—of heavy bloodletting in clashes between Sendero Luminoso and self-de-

fense groups of peasants armed principally with machetes, sticks and stones.

A Peruvian civilian with first-hand knowledge of the Ayacucho area said 70 peasants and 15 guerrillas died in one such clash near the settlement of Paloma Alegre in November.

Self-Defense Groups

Afterward, in a document filed with provincial officials here, 43 municipal officials in the area appealed for military support against the Sendero Luminoso. The document says, "The terrorists have stolen our cattle, horses and sheep, and our food . . . and have killed 1% of our people. . . ."

Since the appeal was written, Peruvian sources say, the Sendero Luminoso have kidnaped women and children from villages whose officials signed it and have beaten back—with heavy losses—several frenzied attempts by the peasants to free them. The guerrillas are said to have cut the throats of some hostages, a method that has recently become the guerrillas' favorite manner of execution.

It is usually impossible to verify the details of reports of clashes in isolated Andean settlements,

which have no roads or communication and which, in the best of times, are remote from the rest of Peru—and the 20th Century.

Still, such reports are persistent, and they are symptomatic. And, while the consensus is that Sendero Luminoso is hurting, nobody suggests that it is anywhere near defeated.

The government of lame-duck President Fernando Belaunde Terry continues to insist that the guerrillas are foreign-inspired and foreign-supported, but there continues to be no public evidence to back up the assertion.

Leading presidential candidates seem more inclined to believe that Sendero Luminoso is a Peruvian phenomenon. The guerrillas, who say they are Peru's only true Communists and revile all other Peruvian Marxists, have no overt support anywhere within the Peruvian political spectrum.

All presidential candidates—including the Marxist mayor of Lima, who is likely to run second—have vowed to wipe them out.

Times reporter William D. Montalbano, based in Buenos Aires, recently was on assignment in Peru.